

SUGGESTED READINGS

The EU and the Arctic since 2021

Compiled by Gabriella Gricius

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The internet is filled with perspectives and opinions. These lists, compiled by academic subject matter experts, are intended to help direct policy makers, practitioners, and academics to credible, open-access sources, available online, free of charge, that reflect leading-edge research and thinking. The compilers of each list have been asked to select readings that are accessibly written (i.e. they are not filled with excessive jargon), offer a diversity of viewpoints, and encourage critical thinking and debate.

Simultaneously inside and outside, the EU's position in the Arctic has interested scholars since its initial 2008 formulation of its Arctic interests. Over the last sixteen years, however, the EU's strategy towards the Arctic has shifted in line with changing geopolitical currents, the most recent of which was its 2021 Joint Communication. The following readings provide analyses conducted by key observers of the region since the publication of the EU's 2021 Arctic Policy Update. While several of these commentators explore the role of EU-Russia relations in a more competitive world, others offer potential readings of the EU's changing role in the region.

The Arctic Institute, [EU-Arctic Series 2023](#).

The Arctic of the 21st century is neither uncharted territory nor waters for the European Union. The EU has good reasons for being present and pursuing its interests in the region. This collection of articles includes [Emilie Canova's comparative analysis of various Arctic policy documents over the last fifteen years](#) and [Mario Giagnorio's reflections on the crossroads of science diplomacy and Italy's challenges with respect to EU-Arctic engagement](#). [Alexander Middleton critically analyses Finland's Arctic policy](#) while [Erika Varik explains Estonia's vision for a more influential EU in the Arctic](#). [Gabriella Gricius and Iren Marinova suggest that EU policies on Russia and the Arctic cannot be divorced from one another](#). [Luke Laframboise reflects on what he describes as thirty years of EU inaction on Sámi rights](#), while [Anja Máryá Nystø Keskitalo and Jacqueline Götze argue that EU Arctic policy and the European Green Deal must resonate with the EU's policy on Indigenous Peoples](#). A final piece by [Aleksis Oreschnikoff argues why the EU should focus on the co-production on knowledge](#) about the Arctic to build resilience and advance both normative and geopolitical objectives.

Romain Chuffart and Andreas Raspotnik. “[More EU in the Arctic and More Arctic in the EU?](#),” *New Security Beat*, 7 February 2022.

This article describes how although the EU has Arctic-focused strategies and policies, particularly the recent 2021 Joint Communication, other types of internal policies and foreign policies not focused on the Arctic can also have an impact on Arctic governance. The authors draw upon the example of the European Green Deal, describing how even though the Arctic is not its central focus, the deal has consequences for the Arctic. Such implications include less dependence on Arctic hydrocarbons and encouraging the development of renewable energy and green partnership in the region which will inevitably impact the EU’s Arctic footprint. However, it bears noting that the EU’s green transformation may also incite challenges such as the impacts on Indigenous communities in the Arctic.

Romain Chuffart, Andreas Raspotnik, and Adam Stępień, “[Our common arctic? A more sustainable EU-arctic nexus in light of the European green deal](#),” *The Polar Journal* (2021).

This article suggests that before the EU can build a robust Arctic policy, it must develop an internal and regulatory framework that considers the ongoing change in the Arctic. In short, a comprehensive and integrated EU policy requires as a prerequisite, more robust environmental policies in Europe. By exploring the EU’s energy-climate policy complex, the authors emphasize how the EU’s capacity to be a global regulator and setting environmental standards with influence on the Arctic relies upon how EU environmental policies and legislation are set internally.

Thomas Hughes, “[Defence in the European Arctic in 2022](#),” *NAADSN*, 23 December 2022.

The war in Ukraine is undoubtedly the defining feature of defence in Europe in 2022. It is also undeniable that the consequences of this conflict are likely to influence the dynamics of defence in the European Arctic, both directly (for example, through the acceleration of Sweden and Finland joining NATO) and indirectly (for example, potential changes in Russia’s military capability and negotiating position). Historically, direct discussion of military activity in the Arctic has not occurred in the Arctic Council. However, heightened military activity prior to 2022 suggested that some contact in an alternative forum may be beneficial in order to reduce the potential for misunderstanding and miscalculation. With Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, however, the possibility of formal international engagement about defence-related activities in the Arctic has further diminished. In the context of frequent military activity in the Arctic, this may become increasingly problematic. This paper focuses on NATO and Russian military exercises in the European Arctic in 2022, and their respective responses, as well as touching on the implications of Sweden and Finland joining NATO.

Julien Lebel and Annika Nilsson, “[EU Engagement in the Arctic: Challenges to Achieving Ambitions in an Area outside its Jurisdiction](#),” *Arctic Review on Law and Politics* (2024).

The European Union (EU) has underscored its will to heighten its engagement in the Arctic region. Beyond traditional areas of interest – such as tackling climate change, supporting research and developing cooperations – critical resources and security emerged as new topics in the EU’s most recent policy documents. These have become even more critical since February 2022 following Russia’s all-out war against Ukraine. The Circumpolar North is the subject of many challenges caused by climate change and its fragile biodiversity, which, combined with the region’s importance for scientific research, access to natural resources, tourist activities, and military security, places it in a geopolitically strategic position. By focusing on EU ambitions in the Arctic, this article analyses the EU’s potential to implement policies and set consequential trends in an area of political interest outside its jurisdiction. It concludes that core political priorities and sector-specific regulations that directly guide the behaviour of EU members may have more influence than Arctic policy statements.

Tiziana Melchoirre, “[The Arctic as a laboratory for improving the relations between the EU and Russia: Prospects for the Future](#),” *Arctic Yearbook 2022*.

This article discusses the relations between the European Union (EU) and Russia in the Arctic in a scenario development context. Although the war in Ukraine of 2022 has dramatically worsened EU – Russia relations, this article argues that the Arctic could be a laboratory for improving them both regionally and internationally as it offers some opportunities for cooperation especially in three sectors, namely energy, environment and science. The EU and Russia have indeed strong geopolitical and economic interests in these sectors and could therefore benefit from cooperation. Theoretically, the analysis is conducted from a neoliberal institutionalist point of view with a focus on the concept of interdependence, which is a strong incentive to overcome the obstacles to cooperation in order to strengthen their relations.

Harri Mikkola, Samu Paukkunen, and Pekka Toveri, “[Russian aggression and the European Arctic: Avoiding the trap of Arctic exceptionalism](#),” *Finnish Institute of International Affairs Briefing Paper*, 4 April 2023.

This report suggests Russian efforts have been successful in exploiting a narrative of Arctic exceptionalism in order to limit the West’s broader deterrence posture in the Arctic. While limiting the West’s deterrence posture in the Arctic, Russia has simultaneously developed its own military capabilities in the region and used offensive military exercises and hybrid operations against the Western Arctic states. Outside of military security, Arctic economic resources continue to be central for Russian strategic goals and its ability to practice aggression. Thus far, the West has limited its Arctic military activity. However, the authors argue that the Western Arctic states should focus on building comprehensive deterrence in the region.

Andreas Østhagen and Andreas Raspotnik, “[Looking North: The European Union and Arctic Security from a Nordic and German Perspective](#),” Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2021.

In this report, the authors provide a comprehensive overview of Arctic security and the role of the European Union (EU) in that specific policy field, as seen from the Nordic countries and Germany. The value in this endeavor lies not only in providing an EU specific approach to Arctic security issues, but also to better comprehend challenges the EU must grapple with when further developing its Arctic policy. Based on the individual reports by each author and a related workshop in May 2021, three themes and recommendations are in the authors’ opinion evident for the EU’s future role in matters of Arctic security: 1) define the (security) niche the EU could engage with in the Arctic, 2) the ‘EU Arctic spectrum of capabilities’ should serve as a framework for the updated policy and act as a trigger to a more confident relationship with Russia, and 3) increase Arctic knowledge within Member States and better communicate EU (supranational) capacities to the Arctic community.

Michael Paul, “[A New Arctic Strategy for the EU](#),” German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 17 March 2021.

The European Union is an Arctic actor with a long record of engagement. Climate change and safeguarding the Arctic, sustainable development and international cooperation are the priority areas guiding its Arctic policy and its numerous projects in the region. Although the Union lacks formal observer status in the Arctic Council, member states Finland, Sweden and the Kingdom of Denmark are members of the body, along with Iceland and Norway, which are members of the European Economic Area and participate in the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation. Whereas the environmental and sustainability elements spelled out in the Commission’s communication of 2016 remain highly relevant, the region’s growing geopolitical significance makes the lack of a security policy component an increasingly pressing concern. This should therefore be addressed in the EU’s new Arctic policy, which is currently being finalized after the public consultation ended in November 2020. Maritime security offers a tested and appropriate field for expanding EU engagement.

Andreas Raspotnik and Andreas Østhagen, “[The End of an Exceptional History: Re-Thinking the EU-Russia Arctic Relationship](#),” *E-International Relations*. 23 March 2022.

Raspotnik and Østhagen reflect on how Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine has shifted how EU-Russia relations should be considered in the broader European security environment. They suggest that the 2022 invasion might incite a geopolitical awakening of the European Union in which the EU might need to rethink how it uses its economic and regulatory power to influence other actors, particularly in its recently approved Strategic Compass. The authors also argue that EU must consolidate its security role in the Arctic as it has rather timidly covered

such issues in its regional policies and only described security in implicit ways. If the EU is going to become an important geopolitical actor in Europe, it must pay increasing attention to military security concerns in the Arctic. Although the Strategic Compass pays little attention to the Arctic, there is space for a new specific Arctic security threat analysis in future documents.

Andreas Raspotnik and Adam Stępień, “[Oops, they did it again: The European Union’s 2021 Arctic Policy Update](#),” *The Arctic Institute*, 28 October 2021.

The authors consider whether the Arctic policy could be seen as a testing ground for the EU’s foreign policy in general. First, the Arctic could in principle offer possibilities for trying out more effective bridging between internal and external actions. Indeed, the authors believe that the EU’s Arctic engagement portfolio and tangible influence on Arctic affairs (including but not limited to the issues mentioned in the Arctic policy documents) comprises primarily the Arctic implications of the EU’s internal policies and actions. Secondly, the EU positions itself as a more outspoken and confident geopolitical player in the Arctic context. It is unclear how this would reframe the EU’s interactions with Arctic states and other stakeholders – thus far often buttressed by the EU assuming a role of supporting Arctic actors’ own objectives when they align with those of the Union. And if that would ultimately make the EU a more effective Arctic actor. Even if partially bearing fruit in the Arctic, such a confident interaction with international actors, based on the climate and strategic autonomy agendas, may not work in other areas and directions of the EU’s foreign policy.

Andreas Raspotnik, Adam Stępień, and Timo Koivurova, “[The European Union’s Arctic Policy in the Light of Russia’s War against Ukraine](#),” *The Arctic Institute*. 26 April 2022.

The authors offer key insights and challenges for the EU to pursue its Arctic policy as outlined in the 2021 Joint Communication given the fallout from Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine. They suggest that even beyond the removal of Russia from regional Arctic forums, there is significant economic fallout that will have consequences for the EU’s climate, energy, and critical mineral goals. Further, they argue that monitoring and research will become less effective in the Arctic if EU-Russian sharing of Arctic data will become excluded. There may also be positive implications as the EU turns to a closer cooperation with other Western Arctic states and regions.

Additional Readings

Andreas Raspotnik and Adam Stępień, “The European Union’s polar ambitions: regional geo-policies yet limited geostrategic vision.” *Journal of European Integration* 45, no. 8 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2023.2270664>

Iren Marinova and Gabriella Gricius, "The Arctic potential: cutting the Gordian knot of EU-Russia relations?" *European Security* (2024).

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09662839.2024.2306990>

Gabriella Gricius and Andreas Raspotnik, "The European Union's 'never again' Arctic narrative," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 32, no. 1 (2024).

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14782804.2023.2193735>

Joint Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of Regions. *A Stronger EU engagement for a peaceful, sustainable, and prosperous Arctic*. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=JOIN:2021:27:FIN>